



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

DATE: April 24, 2020

TO: Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee (PYDAC)

FROM: Planning & Zoning Staff

SUBJECT: North Potomac Yard, Phase 1 Development – Concept 2 Submissions

Introduction

The applicant, CPYR Theater, LLC CPYR Shopping Center, LLC and Virginia Tech Foundation Inc, have submitted their first formal architectural submissions for Phase 1 Development of North Potomac Yard. The team has developed a submission packet for PYDAC to show the architectural design of each building and begin to demonstrate compliance with the North Potomac Yard Design Excellence Prerequisites and Criteria Overlay. The PYDAC website contains a link to the following submission materials from the applicant team:

- Potomac Yard Design Excellence Matrix: A site-wide and building-by-building matrix identifying areas of conformity with the Design Excellence Standards; and
- An annotated presentation by the applicant team calling out areas within the building design that conform to the Design Excellence Standards.

Staff has drafted this memorandum to supplement the applicant's submission

Background

The North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan designates the area for a mix of uses, including office, multi-family, hotel, academic, and community facilities. The plan includes information on maximum building heights, land uses, and street alignments and the applicants' current proposal is consistent with the vision in the Small Area Plan.

As part of PYDAC's review process, staff has phased building review into the following stages:

- March 2020: Initial review of building mass, height, scale and architectural character;
- April 2020: Review of building architecture; and
- May/June 2020: Second Review of building architecture.

In response to CDC guidance related to COVID-19, there have been no in-person public meetings. To ensure PYDAC can provide feedback on the evolving building design of North Potomac Yard, the applicant is providing a series of community meetings and hosting a virtual PYDAC meeting to solicit feedback. The Applicant Team hosted an initial virtual community meeting on April 22, 2020 to provide an architectural overview of the Group 1 Buildings. A second virtual community meeting is scheduled for April 29, 2020 to go over the Group 2 Buildings. Using the live or recorded overview of the community meetings, in conjunction with Staff's Memorandum and the Applicant's Matrix and Annotated Presentation, please prepare comments to be shared on Wednesday, May 6, 2020. We will have a focused meeting to provide a forum for PYDAC to provide direct feedback to the applicants. As the applicants have hosted the previous two community meetings with an overview of each building, there will be less of a presentation at the May 6th meeting so that PYDAC has time to focus on a more detailed discussion of each building.

Staff has reviewed the applicant's Concept 2 submission and has comments in the following categories:

- Compliance with North Potomac Yard Design Excellence Prerequisites and Criteria Overlay; and
- Architectural Comments on a Building-by-Building Basis.

Compliance with North Potomac Yard Design Excellence Prerequisites and Criteria Overlay:

Staff finds the overall site design is consistent with the Small Area Plan and proposed amended CDD Concept Plan and looks forward to seeing the continued evolution and design of sitewide design elements and design of the public realm. Staff has the following comments in response to the current proposal's compliance with the Design Excellence Standards.

1. **Prerequisite 1 – District as Integrated Whole:** Generally, staff finds that the applicant has met the prerequisite to holistically plan Phase 1 of North Potomac Yard. Buildings display a mix of forms, a variety of uses and demonstrate architectural significance in contextually important locations. Staff would encourage additional refinement in targeted areas, such as:
 - a. Continue to explore the mix of uses and activation of the ground floor to ensure there is a vibrant mix of uses in Phase 1 connecting the Virginia Tech campus to the Potomac Yard Metro. While there is diversity in upper floor uses, limited information has been provided on the expected retail, community-serving, publicly accessible outdoor spaces, or other ground-level uses to help create a unique community identity.
 - b. Provide information on sitewide design features or elements which create a sense of identity for the Innovation District. What design elements signal to visitors that they have arrived in the Innovation District? What is different or unique about this neighborhood within the City?

2. **Prerequisite 2 – Integrated Sustainability:** Staff finds the information provided has not yet demonstrated that environmental sustainability has been integrated fully with the design, open spaces, infrastructure or buildings. While each building has some sustainable features, a holistic integration of sustainable design has not been demonstrated across the site infrastructure, open space and in the several of the buildings.
 - a. Continue to provide information on each building's approach to sustainable design. What features have been incorporated into each building to provide a more sustainable approach to building design, construction, operations and maintenance, and long-term energy use?
 - b. Demonstrate features of sustainable infrastructure and open space design bridging all aspects of construction, operations and maintenance.
3. **Prerequisite 3 – Quality + Durable Building Materials:** With the initial selection of materials for each building, the applicant has demonstrated compliance with the prerequisite to select quality and durable building materials as identified in the Design Excellence Guidelines.
4. **Prerequisite 4 – Off-Street Parking is Located Below-Grade:** With the applicant's proposed building design, at final buildout all off-street parking is located below-grade and complies with the prerequisite as identified in the Design Excellence Guidelines.
5. **Criteria 1 -A Variety of Open Spaces:** The applicant's proposed network of open spaces is consistent with those in the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan and includes a wide variety of public and private open spaces.
 - a. Continue to provide information on the design and proposed programming of public and private open spaces to demonstrate a range of passive and active uses for the spaces which will encourage a diverse set of users to enjoy all of the public spaces.
 - b. The applicant is encouraged to continue to maximize the number and variety of building-based open spaces, including balconies, terraces and rooftops.
6. **Criteria 2 – An Active Public Realm:** Generally, staff finds the applicant's proposal complies with the criteria to provide an active public realm and meet the City's Complete Street Guidelines. Buildings generally provide clear sightlines for interior-exterior visibility and demonstrate high quality architecture. Sidewalk, bicycle lane and roadway widths comply with the Complete Streets Guidelines. However, the finer-grained details required to demonstrate high quality paving materials, site furnishings, lighting and the treatment of service areas have not yet been provided.
 - a. Provide information on the final design and selection of high-quality paving materials, site furnishings and lighting.
 - b. Service areas, such as loading docks, while consolidated along Silver Meteor Avenue, remain a dominant presence on the streetscape are not well integrated into the streetscape design and building architecture. Continue to refine the design of those functions and reduce the impact of the use by reducing the total number of service areas or exploring ways to reduce the overall size of each. Staff strongly

urges the applicant to reduce the visual impact of these functions by: sharing parking garage entrances to the greatest extent possible, using a combined parking/loading entrance with deeply recessed loading doors, and other means to make these necessary functions as unobtrusive as possible.

- c. All buildings should include primary entries along north-south streets, and through lobbies that are visually open are encouraged.

7. **Criteria 3 – Inclusive Design of Buildings and Open Spaces:** Generally, staff finds the applicant's proposed approach to an inclusive design is consistent with the Design Excellence Standards.

- a. As stated previously, continue to provide information on the design and proposed programming of public and private open spaces to demonstrate a range of passive and active uses for the spaces that will allow and encourage a diverse set of users for each space.

8. **Criteria 4 – Integration of Utilitarian Uses:** Staff finds the applicant's proposed design fails to meet Criteria 4 and does not thoughtfully integrate utilitarian uses with the building designs. As seen in the recent submission, each building has utilized two separate curb cuts: one for loading and one for a parking garage entrance. Staff has encouraged a single consolidated entrance for both loading and parking uses, which would reduce the number of curb cuts on the street and narrow the area of the sidewalk impacted by vehicular traffic. Also consider:

- a. Separate double entrances should be combined into one entrance.
- b. Below-grade shared parking garages should seek to share above-ground entrances and minimize the number of, and area dedicated to garage entrances along the street level.
- c. Continue to refine the presence of garage entrances and loading docks to minimize the visual impact of these utilitarian areas. Work on the building design to further diminish the views of the loading docks and garage entrances and incorporate them into the overall building fabric, for example by recessing them more deeply and incorporating creative design and materials to enhance what can be seen from the public realm.
- d. Refine the streetscape design to reduce the width of those service areas and ensure that pedestrians and cyclists are priorities.
- e. Continue to work on designs to ensure rooftop penthouses are integrated into the building's architectural design and comply with the Design Excellence Standards. Penthouse materials should match those of the existing building, recede into the background, or be integrated into the top floor of the building to minimize the visual presence of the structure.

9. **Criteria 5 – Unique and Identifiable Signage:** The applicant has not yet provided information on the proposed signage for Phase 1 of North Potomac Yard. Additional information should be provided on:

- a. Individual building signage.
- b. District-wide wayfinding and placemaking signage.

10. **Criteria 6 – Architectural Excellence:** Generally, staff finds the applicant's comprehensive building designs achieve architectural excellence and demonstrate a variety of building expressions, read as holistic entities and express their building programming.
- Continue to seek opportunities to differentiate building height and articulation across Phase 1. When possible, modify rooftops and overall building heights to create a unique skyline, increase visual interest, and eliminate the sense of a uniform datum line.
 - Explore opportunities to increase the degree and expression of architectural features, such as projections, plane changes or other embellishments to heighten the diversity of building expression.
 - Demonstrate that the Innovation District is a coordinated, holistic design by presenting a complete set of the building elevations in context through the use of continuous, north-south and east-west color rendered and shadowed street elevations.

Building Design:

The following comments are for each building in Phase 1 development.

Building 7W: SmithGroup Architects (Academic)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The successful embodiment of sustainable design in the building's design approach, massing and materials.
- An open ground floor which encourages porosity and views into the building.
- Glass expression which allows for sightlines into the building at various floors.
- The vertical expression of fins while preserving the geometric simplicity and expression of the building massing – there is a balance and tension between the “skin” and the fins that maintains the pristine form while achieving a finer grain of detail and environmental response

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- Visual porosity of the first floor and entries from primary streets is critical in creating an active presence; staff recommends that an entry to the lobby be added facing Potomac Avenue.
- Design excellence requires all building parking to be below grade, identify alternative parking arrangements to allow for the removal of proposed interim surface parking lots.
- Review the proposed design of the internal courtyard area between buildings 7W, 7W and 4 and consider the balance of raised versus flush planters and ensuring that pathways between buildings provide users the option for direct access, along with areas for gathering.

Building 10: Hickok Cole Architects (Office and Innovation)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The overall building design and interplay between the unique north façade design and the strong, relatively simple design of the two towers.
- The northernmost glass wall of the building works as both a focal point for people arriving from the west and pays homage to the language of Building 7W with a similar prismatic geometry.
- The strong architectural base of the northern tower, which uses strong, geometric piers to support the lighter, veil-like massing above to create a successful pedestrian-level interface between building and the ground plane.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- As seen on the eastern façade, study the height of the base of the southern tower – lowering the base datum could provide a meaningful height differentiation between the north and south towers while still expressing connectivity of the two buildings.
- As seen on the eastern façade, explore different and higher solid to glass ratios between the two buildings. Provide information regarding the intent of the ratio and how this addresses the sustainability criteria for NPY. The presence of additional solid elements could help address environmental questions regarding heating/cooling and lighting.
- Continue to refine the patterning and design of the southern end of the building as the design still feels somewhat unresolved/unfinished.
- In addition to the existing central lobby, provide additional entrances at the base of the northern and southern towers along New Street B. Explore opportunities to align entrances through the building to allow for increased actual and visual building porosity and connectivity with the park and across New Street A to the adjacent Building 14.
- Reconsider the ground-level design of the southern end of the building and reduce the size of and/or number of curb cuts. Explore options to create a shared loading/parking entrance or eliminate the parking garage entrance at either Building #15 or Building #10 in favor of having one entrance for both buildings.
- Continued design of the ground-floor pedestrian plaza areas in front of the northern tower and the relationship of the outside spaces with the adjacent Market Lawn at Building 14 and Virginia Tech; how are the spaces differentiated to encourage different users and experiences, yet still connected visually and thematically?

Building 14: Cook Fox Architects (Office)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The overall building design with a series of building steps, the strategic notches and façade shifts, the innovative use of fins for sustainability purposes and architectural

interest, and incorporation of loggias and terraces at different levels and different sizes that incorporate landscaping.

- The delicate and transparent use of glass as the primary building material.
- The use of a system of outboard vertical fins to achieve effective climate response as well as create a unique façade vocabulary.
- Very effective use of terracing and negative space to break the height datum by creating a series of three volumes that grow in height as the eye moves north.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- Staff would like to see a clearer expression of the rationale behind the overall spacing of the fins in general, and particularly along the eastern and western facades. There is a random-looking compression and expansion in their spacing between floors that is still more confusing than engaging. A clear organizing principle should be identified and used.
- *Carried Forward from Previous Memo:* Continue to explore the design of the “garden room” at the northern end of the building. Explore ways to emphasize the space through increasing the height of the space, pulling the indoor garden further into the exterior space or other design treatments to highlight the space.
- Reconsider the ground-level design of the southern end of the building and reduce the size of and/or number of curb cuts. Explore options to create a shared loading/parking entrance or eliminate the parking garage entrance at either Building #19 or Building #14 in favor of having one entrance for both buildings.

Building 15: Hord Coplan Macht Architects (Multi-Family Residential)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- Staff appreciates the dynamic building massing which utilizes deep notches to create a variety of open spaces such as terraces and balconies for residential use.
- At the southern end of the building, a floating residential wing which engages with Metro Plaza and an answering projection on Block 18, across the plaza. The projecting wing simultaneously creates a strong architectural feature that will be seen by everyone arriving by Metro while also creating a unique sheltered area for pedestrians.
- A long-linear balcony along the future North Potomac Yard Park to reinforce a strong relationship between the building and the park.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- In order to achieve the desired level of porosity through the building, the building should have two entrances, one on the eastern side of the building and another on the western side, creating a through-lobby on the building’s ground-level. Explore options to put the primary residential lobby along New Street B, facing the Park.
- Along the southern building face, which looks over Metro Plaza, look at options to reintroduce the upward-sloping roof element and the general design of the southern

building façade, including its use of glass. The addition of the sloping roof element would also help to introduce variations in roofline height.

- Explore options for the ground-floor of the building along New Street B to acknowledge the residential units with individual entrances. The current building design reads as a commercial design and does not show doors, despite plan information which shows residential units.
- Reconsider the design of the V-shaped support posts for the large building projection on the southern end of the building. In the current submission, these posts appear too heavy and obscure the windows of the retail/commercial space behind them when seen from the Metro arrival point – reorientation and downscaling can address this problem.
- Increased building dimensionality with areas of projection, such as bay windows along the building face.
- Reconsider the ground-level design of the northern/northeastern end of the building and reduce the size of and/or number of curb cuts. Explore options to create a shared loading/parking entrance or eliminate the parking garage entrance at either Building #15 or Building #10 in favor of having one entrance for both buildings.

Building 18: Hickock Cole Architects (Office)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The overall building composition of a successful layering of boxes nested within each other, which was further accented by a strong north-south shear to create similar, dramatic overhangs on each end which creates a balanced tension within the building composition.
- The use of a lighter glass box on the northern building end which overhangs Metro Plaza and serves as a strong architectural feature of the building. The architectural movement echoes that of Building 15, across the plaza, and creates a sheltered space for pedestrian activity on the Plaza.
- The simplistic and linear paneling of the building features which begins to express a clean design evocative of a classic Bauhaus building expression.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- *Carried Forward from Previous Memo:* Explore additional dimensionality along the eastern building face, which runs parallel to the Metrorail lines, through the weaving of floor depths or canting the building face.
 - At the building mid-point where the long linear face projects into a point towards the Metrorail Lines, explore a plane shift to pull one of the linear segments in front of the other by 3-5 feet to create additional dimensionality to the building.
- In areas where the building “boxes” overlap and meet, explore options to increase the layering of those intersections to create additional depth and dimensionality. Can portions be pushed in or out by three to five feet to read as more meaningful movements?

- Continue to explore the balance of solid materials against the proposed glassy skin of the building. Along the Northwestern side of the building, explore options to increase the thickness and therefore presence of proposed vertical mullions while maintaining the restrained pattern language. Along the eastern building façade, continue to explore the pattern language which achieves a more sense of movement. Consider options for a bolder color choice and potentially increase the percentage of the building face which uses a solid.
- *Carried Forward from Previous Memo:* Continue to refine the southern portion of the building as it relates to New Street A to ensure that the “back of house” functions of the building, such as the loading dock, are integrated into the building design and comply with the Design Excellence Standards. Consider options to share loading and parking functions and reduce the number of curb cuts and visibility of any loading areas.

Building 19: Hord Coplan Macht Architects (Residential)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The initial differentiation between a “northern” and “southern” portion of the building to break down the linear mass and create visual interest.
- The orientation of the building’s southeast corner which embraces the nearby Metro Plaza with prominent building uses, such as a terrace and potential retail space, which overlook the future activity in the Plaza and address the Metro arrival point directly.
- Genuine variation in building depth, using notches, to create variety in building expression and provide opportunities for a variety of outdoor space for residents through the terraces and balconies.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- Continued refinement of the “northern” and “southern” portions of the building, and consider approaches such as:
 - Use of a different brick color than gray for the northern end of the building, potentially one that is lighter in color and is chromatically stronger;
 - Revise/differentiate the window patterns or other architectural detailing;
 - Demonstrate greater detailing within the brick facades; and
 - Lower the building height by one story on the two building projections on the western/northwestern side and on the two building projections on the eastern/northeastern side of the building, or pull the top floor back far enough to create usable private open space and break the datum line.
- At the southern end of the building on the top floor, continue the wrapping of the screen of metal “V”s around all three sides of the southern tower element so it reads holistically.
- Reconsider the ground-level design of the northern end of the building and reduce the size of and/or number of curb cuts. Explore options to create a shared loading/parking entrance or eliminate the parking garage entrance at either Building #19 or Building #14 in favor of having one entrance for both buildings.

Building 20: Elkus Manfredi Architects (Office)

Staff finds the overall building form and organization successful in the following areas:

- The successful balance between a northern and southern tower that utilize a similar underlying grid and materials while differentiating between a northern tower with a strong vertical emphasis and a southern tower which expresses a stronger horizontal design.
- The use of a tiered southern series of decks to create usable open space for building tenants and create a visually interesting southern building design.
- The concentration of ground floor retail uses along the northern building tower to focus pedestrian activity towards Metro Plaza.
- The integration of DASH bus shelters into the building and streetscape design to create an urban bus hub.

Staff would encourage further refinement and exploration of the following areas of the Building design:

- *Carried Forward from Previous Memo:* Incorporate the rooftop penthouse design so it reads as a portion of the building to give the impression of two different building heights and to ensure compliance with the Design Excellence Standards.
- On the northern tower, explore options to replace the screened louvers on the top floor with glass, by pulling mechanical equipment away from the perimeter, to appear similar to the occupied floors below.
- Explore options to create usable rooftop open space.
- *Carried Forward from Previous Memo:* Continue to refine the southern portion of the building as it relates to New Street A to ensure that the “back of house” functions of the building, such as the loading dock, are integrated into the building design and comply with the Design Excellence Standards. Consider options to share loading and unloading functions with Building 18, or other strategies, to reduce the number of curb cuts and loading areas.